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PROGRAM Colby of the CIA STATION WTOP TV  
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SUBJECT ~~Full Text~~ Daniel Schorr Interviews William F. Colby

ANNOUNCER: Colby of the CIA, a conversation with CBS News correspondent Daniel Schorr.

DANIEL SCHORR: The CIA, accustomed to working in the shadows, has for the past year been subjected to the greatest ordeal of exposure in its history of almost three decades. It's been gone over by the Executive, by Congress, the press, and the public. At times it's been a question of whether the agency could survive, little question it would not survive in its old form.

To lead the CIA through this wilderness, it fell to a veteran of covert operations, William Colby. He had risen through the ranks to become the post-Watergate Director. To defend his agency, he adopted a policy of cautious candor with investigating committees that sometimes got him into trouble within his agency and in the Administration. He considers himself expendable, and he was expended.

Colby now has his first opportunity to put the experience together, to reflect on what the agency has been through and where it's going now. We asked him to share some of his reflections with us. The interview was edited for reasons of time.

Mr. Colby, if you now had to consider a choice of a profession, would you choose intelligence?

DIRECTOR WILLIAM COLBY: I certainly think I would. I think that intelligence, during my lifetime, has been a fascinating career, and I think it's going to be an even more fascinating career if I were choosing a new profession today, because the changes that have occurred in intelligence have been enormous over these last 25-30 years, and I think the changes that will occur

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to it over the next 25 or 30 years will be equally startling.

SCHORR: Then you don't think that the profession of intelligence has been tarnished by the publicity that intelligence has gotten in the past couple of years.

DIRECTOR COLBY: No. I think we've had a little trouble with -- to put it mildly, I've had trouble with the stories about intelligence. I think there's -- as you well know, I think there's been a gross exaggeration of the stories about intelligence, of the bad features in our background. But really, that represents the old intelligence.

I think that the image of intelligence, as somehow related to bad things, is traditional over the past hundreds of years, from the times of Sir Francis Walsingham back as far -- back to Jericho's time; when Joshua sent two spies into the city, they came out -- they spent the night in a harlot's house. I think that old image of intelligence being of that nature is the thing that is changing, and we are purging ourselves of that old image.

SCHORR: Let me say in passing that if you meant to be interpreted as telling future agents that there'll be no more harlots' houses, you may have trouble with your recruiting.

DIRECTOR COLBY: No, I don't think so. I think that the people who come here to work are very dedicated people. They choose deliberately a life of anonymity and a life of service to their country. I've had situations which are about as challenging or as exciting, as you will, as most people can even contemplate.

But on the other hand, the main part of your time is spent in the rather more mundane pursuits of learning about things, judging about what the situations are, trying to understand people, trying to understand new technologies that are developing, trying to assess the reality of the world around us.

SCHORR: Could you have imagined at any time before that you'd have to be fighting in Congress and fighting a public relations battle for the institution itself? •

DIRECTOR COLBY: Oh, certainly not. Again, I go back to that rather conscious choice of career in the past, where I really didn't expect to be ending up on the television cameras. I was waiting for a testimony one time in one of these committees, and I commented to a friend of mine sitting next to me that this was a very strange way to run an intelligence service. But the fact that that has been the need of the moment.

There has been a need to go through the process of bringing American intelligence clearly under America's Constitution and legal system. I think the traditional concept of intelligence was

that somehow it was outside of law, it really didn't have anything much to do with law, and it somehow was something that nations did but didn't talk about.

Well, that's no good for America. We expect our government to work under the laws and under the Constitution, and we've been in the process of demonstrating that very clearly to us in the intelligence profession, as well as to the American people at large.

SCHORR: Did you think that it could be handled as an internal reform process, without any public explanation or public retribution?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, I think I did, frankly. But then we went through six months of excitement with all sorts of accusations and sensationalism, and I think the normal citizen is inclined to think that I spend my day in this office plotting assassinations.

Well, the actual finding of the committee was really quite revealing, because it indicated that this agency, in the last 25 years, did go out to try to bring about the end of the life of two individuals, neither of whom died as a result of that effort. There were other people who've been killed in the process of operations, certainly; there are our own officers who have been killed, there are foreigners who have been killed in the course of revolutions and coups, things of that nature. But there haven't been any assassinations conducted by this agency.

SCHORR: But they tried.

DIRECTOR COLBY: There were two situations in which clearly this particular report indicates that there were steps taken here to bring this about. But they didn't happen.

And, you know, over 25 years, to say that that characterizes the work of the agency I think is just plain wrong. And I think the American people are going to see through the sensational treatment to the reality that's underneath it when they get a serious assessment of what the facts actually were.

SCHORR: Are there people who don't want you to clean up your shop because they're afraid of the chain reaction which may affect their careers?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Oh, I don't -- I've never heard of any suggestion to that effect, no. No, I think that any differences that may have existed in how to handle this whole investigation situation were good-faith differences as to how to enable a very important intelligence function and agency to continue to serve the country in the best way it can.

SCHORR: You said that you never ordered any assassination and that you were never personally involved in any of those plans for assassination. Yet, are you saying that none of the things that happened was enough to outrage you?

DIRECTOR COLBY: No, I don't think so -- the ones that I knew of. I didn't know anything about those two cases I was telling you about at the time. I indicated that when I discovered them, they were long in the past; they obviously had been the subject of directives that we would not do that anymore; and I really didn't think anything particularly about them at that time.

SCHORR: Yeah, but there was opening of mail and a certain amount of electronic surveillance and a certain amount of physical surveillance and...

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, the opening of the mail, I think, is a very good example of the problem we have. The opening of the mail is illegal; it says so in the law. No question about it. And once we discovered it, we stopped it, in 1973.

SCHORR: Twenty years later.

DIRECTOR COLBY: But let's look at when it started and what it was devoted to. It was reading the mail between the United States and the Soviet Union at a -- it began at a time when we had Soviet spies working in this country, when we were very concerned about the spreading of the Communist influence around the world, and when the confrontation between the Free World and the Communist World, the Cold War, was the big subject that went on.

Then, unfortunately, the bureaucratic aspect began to work, and the program went on and on, much longer than it should have; it should have been stopped long ago. It should never have been started, of course, but even if it had been properly started at one time, perhaps it should have been stopped.

This -- I don't think there's a great moral revulsion in this. There is a violation of law. But there's a great difference between that and some of the things that you think of in terms of the operations of other intelligence services.

SCHORR: You must have been aware when you started on this last year or so of presiding over this wave of disclosure and wave of investigation that probably no one could fulfill that role without being expendable and having to leave himself in the end.

DIRECTOR COLBY: Oh, I don't know. I really didn't think much about it. I confessed that at the end of 1974 -- I joked with some of my friends that it might be nice if we could jump direct from '74 to '76 and skip '75, and there a number of days in '75 I wished we'd done just that. But no, I really didn't con-

template it one way or the other.

SCHORR: What's been the effect on your family life and your personal life? Has any part of it suffered?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, we've had one family tragedy, yes, in our time. But other than that, no, not particularly. Our children, I think, have a hard time once in awhile when they see their father's picture on the posters around town with the denunciations of being an assassin, or something of that nature. But they've been very supportive and very strong-minded kids and a very strong-minded family generally.

SCHORR: The wave of disclosure has probably about run its course, and yet there is a residue of questions. Some, like Charles Colson, continue suggesting that there was a sort of a conspiracy in the CIA against the Nixon White House, that the CIA played some part in bringing down Nixon. Any truth?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Absolutely not. This agency has, if anything -- I think the record shows very clearly that, if anything, it's too loyal and too responsive to past Presidents, that it is precisely responsiveness to Presidents that in some cases today is now criticized, where we have reacted. I think giving the red wig to Mr. Hunt was an example of responding to what seemed to be a White House, presidentially-sponsored, request. And we shouldn't have done it, and later we withdrew from it, as soon as we saw the depth to which it seemed to be going.

But absolutely not, no. There's no connection in this agency with any conspiracy against Mr. Nixon. We absolutely had nothing to do with the assassination of President Kennedy.

I think that, in a way, the CIA has been, indeed, the scapegoat of many things that have happened. And I think, statistically, you can find that the abuses by the CIA frequently lead the headline, and then later we find that there are considerably more or that this was really a small portion.

SCHORR: If you had to project, what would you see this agency, or under whatever name it is, looking like, say, 10 years from now?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Ten years from now, I think that -- the thing I think we will see, the most exciting changes, will be the increase in information and the increase in our ability to perceive the subtleties that exist in the world between different societies, between different cultures, between different kinds of peoples.

In a way, you know, the old idea used to be that intelligence would tell you a secret, so that you would then be able to move the troops to the right of the field and defeat the enemy.

We're far beyond that today. The most exciting prospect of intelligence is the elimination of wars. Because if you look back on most old wars, you find they started by a combination of ambition and misunderstanding. If we can increase the understanding, we can convince the ambitious that they can achieve more through peaceful means than by the futility of fighting.

SCHORR: Why can't this be done more in the open? Why can't the cloak, as well as the dagger, be shed? Why can't you come out and say, "This is what we do, and it's for peace and we don't have to hide it so much"?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, we do. We are doing a great deal of that, of course. I'm here. I'm the only intelligence chief in the world that would appear on this kind of a program. But here I am.

SCHORR: And the first American one.

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, not -- perhaps. But I think that's part of America, it's part of the kind of society. We used to pretend that CIA didn't exist and that we all worked for the United States Government. We don't do that now. Our employees say they work for CIA, and most of them say it proudly. We have a sign in front of the building, when we -- you didn't used to do that. We're one of the few who do around the world, but we do.

We have opened up as much as we can. But if we tell another country which is developing some kind of a new gadget in secrecy that we have identified the chink in his armor that allows us to know that he's doing that, he'll close it up. Or if we tell another country that one of his citizens is telling us information about their plans to hurt our economy, why, they'll fire the man or they'll put him in jail, and we'll no longer know that.

There are secrets. We have to keep some secrets to protect our democracy.

SCHORR: What future in the new CIA you talk about for what used to be called covert activities, some of which have turned out to be counterproductive? What future for that?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Oh, I think -- as I've said for a long time, we don't -- we're not doing very much of that now. I'm afraid that you probably know most of what we're doing right now, thanks to the exposures here recently. But some years ago we did a great deal.

I think it's important that our country, in the future, will be able to affect our foreign situation before it becomes a serious threat to our country. I think that, yes, we can affect some situations by protests, by using our influence directly with

the governments of those countries. But there are governments which are hostile to us, there are leaders who are ambitious and who are going to be demagogic about us. And I think that, really, we should not be in a situation where someone can develop a hostility to us, develop the weapons systems to hurt us, develop his own homemade nuclear bomb, develop an ability to grow in strength by suppression of his neighbors and by association with a great power somewhere else that has major power, until it's too late to face it by any means other than major military action.

SCHORR: What would you tell a young professional joining the CIA today?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, I tell a lot of them, and I talk to quite a few around here; I have lunch with them, I talk to training courses and all the rest of it; and I tell them that they're engaged in an exciting period here, that there is change going on. It's going to be constitutional, it's going to operate under the law, that it's possible to operate under the law.

I think some of my older associates wondered about that, whether it was possible to. I think it can be, and I think we're about to demonstrate it.

SCHORR: We've been talking in Washington terms about an intelligence agency, and somehow there's a gap between the way we talk about it and the way intelligence is perceived by laymen. Where did James Bond go?

DIRECTOR COLBY: Well, I've had my James Bond moments, I suppose. I've gone out of airplanes in the dark over enemy-occupied country. I have met people in the back streets and exchanged information with them. I've dealt with some other rather exciting aspects of the life. And it does exist. There are challenges, there are situations in which you must take risks in order to conduct intelligence. The 30 -- now 32 starts on our front door here in CIA show that 32 people have died in our service. These people were doing their job. There are many others who have done equally dangerous jobs in the past.

I think that there are ways in which we can improve the whole performance of intelligence so that it doesn't require the derring-do of James Bond. There still will be some. There still will be the need to go off and investigate to see what some group up in the hills who represent some group that is opposed to their local totalitarian government is thinking and doing and what kind of people they are. And there will be the odd rides on the camel or the odd meetings of back rooms of cafes where you can be unobserved. But there are not so many of those, thanks to, I think, the improvement in the professionalism of intelligence and the technology that we can bring to it.

SCHORR: So, James Bond's epitaph is "Victim of technological unemployment."

DIRECTOR COLBY: No. As I say, there's still the requirement for courage, both physical and intellectual, in intelligence. But, shall I say, we are a little tighter on the expense accounts of some of our people than maybe James Bond's bosses were.

SCHORR: What will happen to this agency under new management is now being planned between the Administration and Congress. But never again will the CIA be able to work in complete secrecy, relatively uncontrolled, relatively immune to public opinion. That we stand here now on restricted ground, that we interviewed Colby in his seventh-floor office are themselves signs that the cloak has started coming off.

Colby saw that coming, and, professional to the end, tried to prepare the CIA for the inevitable.

This is Daniel Schorr, CBS News, at the CIA.